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Resident Perceptions of Religious Tourism and its Socio-Economic Impacts on Turbat City

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This research investigates residents' perceptions of the socio-economic impacts of religious tourism in Turbat City, Baluchistan, with a specific emphasis on the Zikri pilgrimage to Koh-e-Murad. A quantitative research method was adopted, data were collected from 342 respondents residing in areas near the pilgrimage site i.e. areas of Koh-e-Murad, Kolwai Bazar, and Molid-e-Rek., using a structured questionnaire and convenience sampling. The findings revealed that religious tourism is perceived to positively contribute to employment, income, infrastructural development, and social cohesion. However, concerns regarding environmental degradation, commercialization of religion, and rising living costs were also noted. The study highlights the need for inclusive and sustainable tourism policies that balance economic benefits with the preservation of local traditions and environmental integrity. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and religious tourism stakeholders seeking to develop equitable tourism strategies in culturally sensitive regions.



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Introduction:

Perceptions of individuals define reality in numerous ways, it depends on the firm belief of people in how they perceive reality. However, religious tourism has a worldwide impact on the socio-economic development of different communities. This kind of tourism, which attracts millions of visitors every year, includes pilgrimages, visits to holy locations, and involvement in religious events. Its influence on local communities is significant since it touches a large range of socioeconomic issues. In addition, scholars, decision-makers, and industry professionals in the

tourism industry and other fields are paying more and more attention to the phenomena of religious tourism. Tourism economic benefits are advertised by the industry for a variety of reasons.

Claims of tourism economic significance give the industry greater respect among the business community, public officials, and the public in general. This often translates into decisions or public policies that are favorable to tourism. Community support is important for tourism, as it is an activity that affects the entire community (Vijayanand, 2012). In many places, it is not merely a question of religious significance but also the motivation for social transformation, cultural preservation, and economic growth. Numerous social and economic variables are involved in this context, including the development of infrastructure, the preservation of cultural landmarks, the creation of jobs and revenue, and the encouragement of cross-cultural interaction. Moreover, to these possible advantages, religious travel can also present certain drawbacks, such as the commercialization of culture, crowding, and damage to the environment.

Turbat City is situated in Baluchistan, Pakistan, it is located on the left bank of the Kech River, a stream of the Dasht River. The village has a facility that processes dates and serves as a marketplace for dates farmed in the surrounding area. In addition, the shrine known as Koh-e-Murad (Balochi: کوه مراد) is situated in Turbat, which is a sacred place for worship. They think that Mahdi, the twelfth imam, visited this location and prayed there for a considerable amount of time. Every year on the 27th of Ramadan, members of the Zikri sect gather here for a ritual visitation to this shrine. Koh-e-Murad is a hillock southwest of Turbat city, enclosed in a sizable enclosure. Thousands of Zikris, including men, women, children, the elderly, and young boys and girls, gather there each year during the month of Ramadan. They commit animal sacrifices, conduct the Tawaf and Ziyarat of the hills, host Chaugan and Zikr events, and before departing, give the angels ten percent of their yearly income called 'Danik'. Although there is a great deal of tranquility in this Vatican City of the Zikris, it is disturbed during the month of Ramadan and the first ten days of Zhul Hijjah. According to the Zikris, Koh-e-Murad is the Maqam-e-Mahmood and not just any old spot. There is always the light of the divine in this hallowed location. They view it as a mountain of simplicity. They assert that "when Allah created the earth, it was shaking, then He placed Koh-e-Murad from the sky on it, and it became still." After leaving Koh-e-Murad, the Zikris exclaim, "I have come from the Maqam-e-Mahmood; is there any joke in this?" They further claim that the Holy Quran refers to this hillock. For its Tawaf and Ziyarat, Koh-e-Murad attracts thousands, if not millions, of Zikris or Taris each year who come there by automobile or on foot. For the Ziyarat, everyone strives to dress in new costumes. In general, a sizable portion of men sew new clothing, in addition to over 90% of women and children. The majority of individuals sew white garments, which they view as their ihram. The night of Lailatul-Qadr, or "Hazaar Shap," on the 27th of Ramadan is the night of the Tawaf and Ziyarat of Koh-e-Murad. To secure appropriate spaces, the pilgrims, however, begin traveling there during the second week of Ramadan. If you must travel on the 26th or 25th of Ramadan, send your family ahead of time so they can find an appropriate location to stay. Those who own their cars use them; if not, residents of each Zikri community rent a different car. They bring bedding, tents, firewood for cooking, food for seven or 10 days, and other necessities. The women recite poetry in favor of Noor-e-Pak Muhammad Mahdi and Koh-e-Murad to Turbat as soon as they get inside the automobile (Ahmad, 2019).

Definitions of several important terms; Zikr, Recalling Allah is the act of zikr. In the case of the Zikris, it is a type of Sufi meditation in which the names of Muhammad and Allah are chanted. Chaugan: A classic Balochi game akin to polo is Chaugan. Maqam-e-Mahmood: In Islam, this

location holds immense spiritual significance. It is thought to be the location of Muhammad's supposed second coming to Earth on the Day of Judgment. Danik: The Balochi people traditionally give the impoverished a tithe called danik. Ihram: For some Islamic rites, including the Hajj and Umrah, a state of ceremonial cleanliness known as Ihram is necessary. The term "Hazaar Shap" is a Balochi expression that translates to "Thousand Nights."

Literature Review

Ahmad et al. (2022) emphasized the influence of religion-based tourism on expected growth of Pakistan's "environment-friendly industry," which depicts the potential economic challenges and prospects, including extensive employment generation plus poverty reduction. The research collected data from many sources, inclusive of secondary sources and exchanges with local samples. It recognizes challenges in the religious tourism industry, such as scant developed infrastructure and negative security perception. The findings emphasize the need for improvement in tourism promotion and safety measures. This research can assist policymakers in enhancing travel procedures and ensuring tourist safety in Pakistan. Nair et al. (2022) added the effect of religious events on the livelihoods of the local men in Palakkad, a district in Kerala, India. Residents' joyfulness and passion are further heightened by the festive events, with roots in the history, acute culture, and customs of the area. Twelve temples that are well-known for holding yearly religious celebrations that draw sizable crowds of people from throughout the area were chosen for the study. The purpose of the current study is to comprehend the vision of the community on festivals in terms of socio-cultural depictions and economic affairs.

Lampada et al. (2019) noted Greece's approach to religious tourism has been affected by its deep connection to its religious past and identity. Greece's form of religious pilgrimage, especially in rural regions, focuses on outings to individual religious centers on local saints' days, in contrast to other nations with established religious preaching. Still, the itinerary that follows St. Paul's journeys through Greece is becoming more and more well-known throughout the world, and tourist firms are actively pushing it. The chapter focuses on the St. Paul's route's current infrastructure, how it might be connected to other types of tourism, such as the creation of a hiking trail along Via Egnatia, and how this will affect rural communities by creating chances for local economies and societies to prosper. Adhikari (2018) explores that religious tourism has been a significant driver of shifts in socioeconomic conditions across the globe. The study, however, depicts the socioeconomic effects of pilgrimage in Janakpur. She studied how devoted tourists' presence, especially during festivals, affects the environment and culture. Krippendorf's classification is used in the study to examine how much the locals rely on tourists. A case study of the Chikatsuyu hamlet near the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage routes shows that although small-scale tourism is typically seen positively, the economic consequences are deemed to be not workable. The presence of international tourists is welcomed, as they bring novelty and positive social interactions to the community. Thus, the study also highlights the positive influence of tourism on tradition awareness, conservation, and the increase in events. Hvizdová (2018) highlighted the key features of religious tourism, focusing on pilgrimage as a common form. It examines the economic indicators and the broader aspects of religious tourism beyond pilgrimage activities. The study highlights the significance of religious tourism for regional development, using examples from Australia, Mazovia, and Slovakia. It discusses various denominations represented in Slovakia and specific religious sites and events.

It also presents the findings of the authors' research in Slovakia, emphasizing the importance of effective promotion and implementation by cultural and ecclesiastical institutions to attract both foreign tourists and residents to sacral buildings. Griffin & Raj (2017) delve into the intriguing subject of religious travel and pilgrimage, looking at it from the viewpoint of the travel and tourism sector. It provides insights into definitions, motivations, and the global scale of this unique travel experience. Despite limited international records, the paper brings together various definitions, classifications, and data from diverse sources. It explores pilgrimage types across different religious traditions, shedding light on the immense size of this niche product. Industry projections suggest that religious tourism will continue to grow in importance within the international travel and tourism sector. Nyikana (2017) demonstrated the lack of academic focus on religious tourism, particularly in developing contexts like South Africa. An early analysis of longitudinal research centered on the Easter Festival of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Morija, Limpopo, South Africa, is presented in this paper. The methodology comprised employing a stratified random sample technique to gather data through in-person questionnaire surveys. The findings indicate that although participants expressed great enthusiasm for the socio-economic prospects generated by the event, apprehensions persisted about crucial tourism amenities including banking, transportation, hygiene, and conscientious tourism practices. To address these issues and guarantee the event's sustainability, the study highlights the necessity for authorities to take a fresh tack when it comes to event preparation and execution.

It looks at the benefits that come from the increase of pilgrims and tourists, like new jobs, commercial opportunities, and infrastructural development. Additionally, it delves into the cultural and religious diversity that the pilgrimage center brings to the Jammu region. However, in studying the socio-economic aspects of pilgrimage tourism, this article provides insights into the significance of sacred places and their influence on the local economy. It highlights the global appeal of popular pilgrimage sites like Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, which attracts visitors from different parts of the world. Vijayanand (2012) portrays the resurgence of pilgrimage, both religious and secular, worldwide. It categorizes the visitor population into a continuum ranging from very religious pilgrims to secular tourists, presenting a secular-spiritual and tourism pilgrimage typology. The study highlights the increasing convergence between traditional pilgrimage and tourism, emphasizing the religious pilgrimage and economic significance of the commonalities between religion and tourism in modern pilgrimage sites. Overall, the paper provides theoretical support for the argument that profane tourism impacts are increasingly significant alongside religious aspects in these destinations. Pourtaheri et al. (2012) discussed the effects of religious tourism and pilgrimage in Iran's rural areas. 300 homes in the study region received survey questionnaires as part of the study's qualitative methodology. With SPSS software, statistical tests were used to assess the data. The findings suggest that religious tourism and pilgrimage have a major social, physical, and financial influence on rural households. When compared to villages associated with pilgrimage tourism, those associated with religious tourism exhibit greater impacts. Teodorescu et al. (2016) focused on how Romania's growing tourist industry and educational prospects are impacted by cultural tourism, especially religious tourism. The study analyses economic data and highlights the impact of cultural-religious heritage and traditional values on the local economy. Further, it observed that cultural tourism can be the key factor to explore the economic factors and cultural heritage. The research suggests that cultural tourism can create employment opportunities during economic and social crises while promoting cultural identity. Terziabu et al. (2008) have examined how religious tourism affects the people who live in Tinos, Greece. Based on data gathered from a questionnaire poll, the study concluded

that the majority of locals think religious tourism has a beneficial socioeconomic impact. Variations in views were noted according to age and religious affiliation. Additionally, the study found that although religious visitors are perceived as being similar to locals, they are not always chosen above non-religious tourists. The study makes recommendations for how to grow the island's tourism industry while preserving its religious value. Finally, the research has employed a blend of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The quantitative component of the study involves gathering information using a structured survey that includes pre-established response alternatives for particular topics. This allowed for the collection of numerical data that could be analyzed statistically. On the other hand, the qualitative aspect comes into play during the analysis phase. The researchers have used qualitative analysis techniques to gain a deeper understanding of the responses and identify patterns, themes, or insights that go beyond the numerical data.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to assess residents' perceptions of the socio-economic impacts of religious tourism in Turbat City. The research population included residents living near Koh-e-Murad, particularly in the neighborhoods of Kolwai Bazar and Molid-e-Rek, where the effects of the pilgrimage are most visible.

A structured close-ended questionnaire was developed and pre-tested for clarity and relevance. It included items designed to capture residents' attitudes toward both economic impacts (e.g., employment, income, price changes) and social impacts (e.g., community values, infrastructure, environmental concerns). The reliability of the instrument was verified using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.82$), indicating acceptable internal consistency.

A sample size of 342 respondents was selected through convenience sampling, acknowledging the logistical challenges of probability sampling in the area. While this method limits generalizability, it was considered suitable for exploratory analysis in a region with limited accessibility.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and simple linear regression to determine the strength and significance of relationships between the independent variables (economic and social impacts) and the dependent variable (perceived religious tourism benefits). The regression model used is as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \mu$$

Where:

- Y = Perceived impact of religious tourism
- X_1 = Economic impact
- X_2 = Social impact
- β_0 = Constant
- μ = Error term

Result and Interpretations

The purpose of the research is to analyze the local people's perception regarding religious tourism and the socio-economic impacts on Turbat City. Because it has been recorded globally that religious tourists have various socio-economics on the inhabitants of pilgrimage sites. So, a

structured questionnaire has been designated to check the perception of people situated at nearby Koh-e-Murad regarding the social and economic impacts on them when people from other areas visit Koh-e-Murad for pilgrimage.

Table No.1 indicates the demographic information regarding the respondents. The mean age of the respondents was 22.7 and the range of ages recorded was 16-31 years. The majority of the respondents were female i.e.52% and the rest of them were male i.e.48%. Furthermore, 93% of the respondents were single and 7% of the respondents were married. The monthly family income of the respondents was recorded as; 10,000 or less were 6.1%, 10,000-40,000 were 25.7%, 50,000-80,000 were 38.3%, and 80,000 and above were 29.8%.

Table No.1: Demographic Information

Characteristics of the Respondents=342

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Mean Age of the Respondents		
16-31	22.7	
Gender		
Male	164	48.0
Female	178	52.0
Marital Status		
Single	318	93.0
Married	24	7.0
Monthly Family Income		
Below 10,000	21	6.1
10,000 - 40,000	88	25.7
50,000 - 80,000	131	38.3
Above 80,000	102	29.8

Table No.2 represents the perception of residents regarding religious tourists. Multiple indicators were used to judge the perception of residents regarding the religious tourist. The cumulative responses on agreement depict that religious tourists are welcomed in our community (71.9%), different from ordinary tourists (69.3%), different from local people (60.5%), more preferred than ordinary tourists (49.1%), affect the community stronger than ordinary tourists (61.4%), religious tourists in Turbat should increase (47.4%), the economic impacts derived from religious tourists are more important than the social costs (40.4%), and religious tourists contribute to the commercialization of the religion (51.7%).

Table No.2: Residents' Perceptions of Religious Tourists

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Religious tourists are welcomed in our community	F	24	30	42	183	63
	%	7	8.8	12.3	53.5	18.4
Religious tourists are different from ordinary tourists	F	18	24	63	210	27
	%	5.3	7	18.4	61.4	7.9
Religious tourists are different	F	18	57	60	147	60

from local people	%	5.3	16.7	17.5	43	17.5
Religious tourists are preferred than ordinary tourists	F	15	51	108	129	39
	%	4.4	14.9	31.6	37.7	11.4
Religious tourists affect the community stronger than ordinary tourists	F	30	48	54	159	51
	%	8.8	14	15.8	46.5	14.9
The number of religious tourists in Turbat should increase	F	51	60	69	96	66
	%	14.9	17.5	20.2	28.1	19.3
The economic impacts derived from religious tourists are more important than the social costs	F	21	60	123	120	18
	%	6.1	17.5	36	35.1	5.3
Religious tourists contribute to the commercialization of the religion	F	15	57	93	141	36
	%	4.4	16.7	27.2	41.2	10.5

Table No.3 represents the various indicators to measure the economic impacts of religious tourism on Turbat City. The cumulative responses on agreement show that Religious tourism increases Job opportunities (34.2%), increases Wages (46.5%), increases Income (45.7%), increases Municipal Tax Revenue (39.5%), increases Prices of goods (61.4%), and increases Prices of land and houses (41.2%).

Table No.3: Economic Impacts of Religious Tourism

Statements			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Religious tourism increases Job opportunities	F	33	126	66	75	42	
	%	9.6	36.8	19.3	21.9	12.3	
Religious tourism increases Wages	F	15	90	78	108	51	
	%	4.4	26.3	22.8	31.6	14.9	
Religious tourism increases Income	F	18	99	69	111	45	
	%	5.3	28.9	20.2	32.5	13.2	
Religious tourism increases Municipal Tax Revenue	F	21	93	93	117	18	
	%	6.1	27.2	27.2	34.2	5.3	
Religious tourism increases Prices of goods	F	30	51	51	141	69	
	%	8.8	14.9	14.9	41.2	20.2	
Religious tourism increases Prices of land and houses	F	30	69	102	87	54	
	%	8.8	20.2	29.8	25.4	15.8	

However, table No.4 represents the various indicators to measure the social impacts of religious tourism on Turbat City. The cumulative responses on agreement of religious tourism effects show that it promotes honesty and transparency (56.2%), increases migration in the city (62.2%), affects

the quality of life (64.1%), enhances infrastructural development (57.9%), increases morality (61.4%), enhances the family values (55.3%), promotes confidence (59.7%), quality of cultural events (60.5%), maintenance of tradition (63.2%), enhancement of religious faith (73.6%), increases social problems (57%), increases environmental pollution (57%), and increases in traffic congestion (61.5%).

Table No.4: Social Impacts of Religious Tourism

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Promotion of Honesty and Transparency	F 3	42	105	135	57	
	% 0.9	12.3	30.7	39.5	16.7	
Increases Migration in City	F 12	39	78	153	60	
	% 3.5	11.4	22.8	44.7	17.5	
Effect the Quality of Life	F 15	57	51	150	69	
	% 4.4	16.7	14.9	43.9	20.2	
Enhancement of Infrastructural development	F 3	72	69	147	51	
	% 0.9	21.1	20.2	43	14.9	
Increase Morality	F 12	51	69	141	69	
	% 3.5	14.9	20.2	41.2	20.2	
Enhancement of the Family Values	F 9	60	84	144	45	
	% 2.6	17.5	24.6	42.1	13.2	
Promotion of Confidence	F 15	75	48	147	57	
	% 4.4	21.9	14	43	16.7	
Quality of cultural events	F 9	51	75	147	60	
	% 2.6	14.9	21.9	43	17.5	
Maintenance of tradition	F 9	51	66	150	66	
	% 2.6	14.9	19.3	43.9	19.3	
Enhancement of Religious faith	F 9	36	45	153	99	
	% 2.6	10.5	13.2	44.7	28.9	
Increase in Social problems	F 24	75	48	132	63	
	% 7	21.9	14	38.6	18.4	
Increase in Environmental pollution	F 24	72	51	132	63	
	% 7	21.1	14.9	38.6	18.4	
Increase in Traffic Congestion	F 24	63	45	138	72	
	% 7	18.4	13.2	40.4	21.1	

Thus, the survey responses were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the finding

Table No.5: Regression result of the socioeconomic impact of religious tourism (religious tourism is a dependent variable)

Variables	Coefficients	Standard error	P-value
Economic impact	0.149***	0.057	0.009
Social impact	0.221***	0.057	0.000

Note: *** shows the level of significant at 1% level.

Table 5 shows the regression result of the socioeconomic impact of religious tourism. Both the coefficients are statistically significant at a one percent level. The coefficient of economic impact is 0.149 indicating a positive association between religious tourism and economic activity. Similarly, religious tourism also has a positive and statistically significant social impact.

Discussion and Conclusion

Turbat City is situated in Baluchistan, Pakistan, it is located on the left bank of the Kech River, a stream of the Dasht River. In addition, the shrine known as Koh-eMurad (Balochi: کوه مراد) is situated in Turbat which is a sacred place for worship for Zikri Sect. They think that Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, visited this location and prayed there for a considerable amount of time. Every year on the 27th of Ramadan, members of the Zikri sect gather here for a ritual visitation to this shrine. Koh-e-Murad is a hillock southwest of Turbat city, enclosed in a sizable enclosure. Thousands of Zikris, including men, women, children, the elderly, and young boys and girls, gather there each year during the month of Ramadan. They commit animal sacrifices, conduct the Tawaf and Ziyarat of the hills, host Chaugan and Zikr events, and before departing, give the angels ten percent of their yearly income called 'Danik'.

However, the purpose of the research is to analyze the local people's perception regarding religious tourism and the socio-economic impacts on Turbat City. Because it has been recorded globally that religious tourists have various socio-economics on the inhabitants of pilgrimage sites. Supported by the findings of (Ashfaq & Parveen, 2014; Nair, et al., 2022; Olukole, 2022), that religious tourists provide socio-economic benefits to the local communities.

The findings of the study highlight the positive perception of residents towards religious tourists in Turbat City, Baluchistan, Pakistan. The use of a structured scale to measure the residents' perception is a common method in tourism research to quantify and analyze attitudes and opinions (Getz, 1994). In this context, the residents expressed a welcoming attitude towards religious tourists, distinguishing them from ordinary tourists due to their specific pilgrimage purpose.

The recognition of religious tourists as different from local people due to their diverse backgrounds is a common observation in religious tourism literature. Studies such as Li and Wang (2019) and Smith (1992) emphasize the multicultural nature of religious tourists, who often come from various regions and cultures. Despite these differences, the preference for religious tourists over ordinary tourists, as found in the study, resonates with the idea that tourists motivated by spiritual or religious reasons tend to be perceived more favorably by local communities (Timothy & Teye, 2009).

The expectation that religious tourists should increase in Turbat due to the economic benefits they bring is consistent with the broader literature on the economic impacts of religious tourism. Researchers like Timothy (1999) and Jamal & Getz (1999) have discussed how religious tourism can lead to economic development in host communities through increased spending, job creation, and infrastructure development.

However, the study acknowledges the social costs associated with religious tourism, including potential changes in local culture and the commercialization of religion. The positive correlation observed between religious tourism and the commercialization of religion has been noted in studies such as Timothy & Olsen (2006). These studies discuss the transformation of religious sites into commercialized spaces, raising questions about the balance between economic benefits and the preservation of the sacredness of religious sites.

Moreover, the widely recognized economic impact of religious tourism on Turbat City is substantiated by existing research. Studies by Butler (2001) highlight the potential for religious tourism to create job opportunities, increase wages, and boost income levels in destination communities. The observed rise in municipal tax revenue aligns with findings from Timothy (1999), emphasizing how religious tourism can contribute to local government revenues through taxes and fees. The documented hikes in prices of goods, land, and houses resonate with research by Dwyer & Forsyth (1992), indicating that increased tourism activities, including religious tourism, can stimulate demand for goods and properties, consequently driving up prices. This economic impact underscores the multifaceted contributions of religious tourism to the financial well-being of Turbat City, emphasizing the importance of strategic planning to harness and sustain these positive economic outcomes.

Furthermore, the documented social impacts of religious tourism on the residents of Turbat City offer a nuanced perspective. The positive aspects encompass the promotion of honesty and transparency, enhancing the quality of life, and fostering infrastructural development. These align with existing research, such as Gursoy et al. (2002), which emphasizes the potential for tourism to positively influence community dynamics and quality of life. Additionally, the observed increases in morality, enhancement of family values, and promotion of confidence among residents mirror findings in studies by Jamal and Getz (1995) and Timothy & Nyaupane (2009), highlighting the socio-cultural benefits associated with religious tourism. On the contrary, the study also notes challenges linked to religious tourism, including heightened social problems, environmental pollution, and traffic congestion. These negative impacts echo concerns raised by Andereck & Vogt (2000) and Sharpley & Telfer (2002) regarding potential adverse effects on community well-being and the environment due to increased tourism activities. This dual perspective underscores the need for balanced strategies that maximize the positive impacts of religious tourism while mitigating its negative consequences on the social fabric and the environment.

In summary, the findings of the study are supported by existing literature in the field of religious tourism, emphasizing the importance of residents' positive perceptions, the diverse backgrounds of religious tourists, and the economic benefits associated with religious tourism. Additionally, the acknowledgment of potential social costs aligns with the ongoing discussions in the academic literature about the delicate balance between economic gains and the preservation of cultural and religious values in pilgrimage destinations.

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